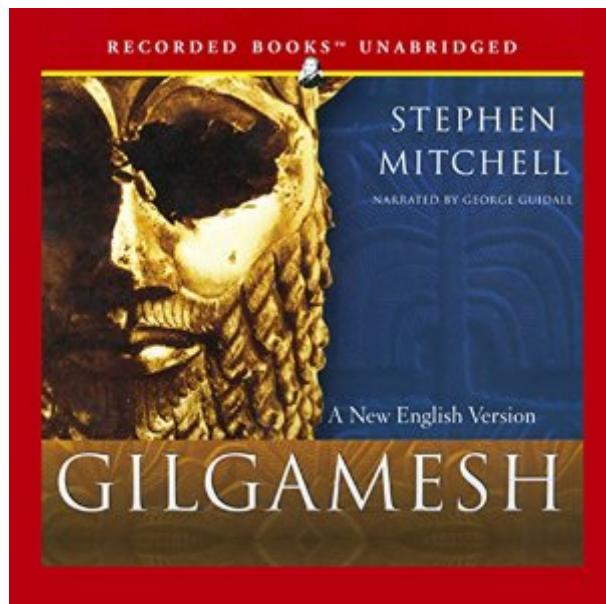


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Gilgamesh: A New English Version



Synopsis

Gilgamesh is considered one of the masterpieces of world literature, but until now there has not been a version that is a superlative literary text in its own right. Acclaimed by critics and scholars, Stephen Mitchell's version allows us to enter an ancient masterpiece as if for the first time, to see how startlingly beautiful, intelligent, and alive it is. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

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Customer Reviews

I remember in Year 9 literature, our teacher came and whacked down a great pile of photocopies on each of our desks. It was bits and pieces of this story called Gilgamesh, one of the oldest surviving written works around. We were reading the part about the Scorpion Men, I remember, and I thought it was pretty interesting. Since then, I've always been meaning to check it out, and just recently, I picked up this modern version of the Sumerian epic. Gilgamesh is the story of the giant of the same name, King of the ancient Sumerian city of Uruk. He's handsome, he's strong, he's brave, but unfortunately he's a bit of a tyrant, and he oppresses his people. To stop his brutal ways, the gods create a likeness of Gilgamesh, Enkidu, who they put out in the wilds. Enkidu is a man who grows to become Gilgamesh's closest ally, and over a series of quests is one who changes his life and his life's meaning forever. This adaption is a version, and not a translation. Stephen Mitchell, the author of this version, admits that he can't read Akkadian (the original language of Gilgamesh) but instead relied on several amplified and literal translations of the text for inspiration. As it is, I found it very, very easy to read, even compared to other modern versions of literature (Seamus Heaney's version of Beowulf, for instance). At a relaxed pace, I was able to get through this book in a couple of

days. The book itself I felt could have been a bit shorter. The introduction and endnotes combined take up half the pages! The introduction was all right, but not exactly my cup of tea.

I was in a wine store the other day, looking for an exquisite wine. Somehow Stephen Mitchell's name came up in the conversation. Then the wine merchant told me how his life had been deeply influenced by Mitchell's translations of Rilke. He said that the essence of Rilke's work had inhabited Mitchell's translations. So it is no wonder that Mitchell's latest offering, his translation of the ancient epic Gilgamesh, has been chosen as the Book Sense "2004 Highlight for Poetry." Harold Bloom agrees with the wine merchant about Mitchell's ability as a translator when he writes that Mitchell's Gilgamesh "is as eloquent and nuanced as his translations of Rilke." Mitchell is that rare talent who combines scholarship and exquisite poetic sensibility in the service of a translation. His rendering of Gilgamesh expresses the soul of this most ancient of epics in all of its lyrical splendor and primordial wisdom - so much so that you can feel the beauty and the wisdom on every page. Mitchell informs us in his introduction that Rilke wrote: "Gilgamesh is stupendous. I consider it to be one of the greatest things that could happen to a person." So when you have a work with such ancient and innate power as Gilgamesh, we are doubly fortunate when someone such as Mitchell gives us the gift of his translation. His scholarship and poetic eloquence resonate in harmony together to capture the essence of the work. Mitchell says he was possessed by the task of the translation when in reading Gilgamesh one of its lines came to him as "Climb the stone staircase, more ancient than the mind can imagine." I am reminded of how John Fowles described the inception of The French Lieutenant's Woman as an image that came to him of a woman standing alone at the end of a misty pier.

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